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SUBJECT: FINNISH RESPONSE - APPROACHING THE EU IN ADVANCE  
OF THE MARCH 30-31 FOREIGN MINISTERS MEETING (GYMNICH)

REF: SECSTATE 37792

Classified By: POLCHIEF GREGORY THOME FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (U) PolChief delivered subject demarche to Finnish CFSP Director and European Correspondent Jarno Syrjala March 28. Syrjala offered the following comments of interest regarding the March 30-31 GYMNICH:

¶2. (C) MISSILE DEFENSE: Although a discussion of US plans to place missile defense assets in Poland and the Czech Republic is not on the GYMNICH agenda, German FM Steinmeier intends to add it under "any other business," Syrjala said. Finland and many others do not support addressing missile defense issues in the GYMNICH context, and they hope discussions will be brief. However, the issue could prompt some debate, depending on how Steinmeier phrases his comments, and Finland would defer to the Czechs or Poles to respond, Syrjala opined. The "any other business" agenda will be crowded, he added, with the Belgians seeking to raise the situation in Congo and the British and Irish planning to raise Sudan and Zimbabwe.

¶3. (C) MIDDLE EAST / NUG: In general terms, Syrjala said, no one doubts that Hamas is an extremist organization and must be considered "a dangerous animal." However, the EU also believes it must find a way to engage with the NUG on some level; otherwise, President Abbas "will be left out in the cold." Syrjala acknowledged that Finnish FM Erkki Tuomioja has been "among the avant-garde" in pressing for engagement with the NUG, and that most other EU member states have taken a markedly more cautious approach. (COMMENT: With the Social Democrats' defeat in Finland's March 18 election, this will be Tuomioja's final GYMNICH. There is the possibility that he will seek to 'go out with a bang' by offering an overly strong valedictory in favor of robust EU engagement with the NUG. However, most Finnish officials espouse a much more guarded position toward the NUG. Following Tuomioja's departure, we expect Finland to move toward the EU center as regards the NUG, rather than continuing to be an "outlier.")

¶4. (C) WESTERN BALKANS: UN Special Rep Martti Ahtisaari has made a late decision not to attend the GYMNICH. According to Syrjala, this is "both good and bad," given the signs that EU unity behind Ahtisaari's recommendations to the UNSC may be flagging in some quarters. The Finns believed that a briefing from Ahtisaari might serve to shore up unity at this crucial moment; on the other hand, Ahtisaari's absence might allow some countries like Italy to speak more openly

about where they really stand vis--vis Ahtisaari's recommendations.

15. (SBU) EUROPEAN NEIGHBORHOOD: The EU will be unable to bring Belarus into full ENP partnership any time soon, but it cannot slam the door either, Syrjala said. The Belorussians "know what the EU wants" in terms of democratic reform and an improved human rights record, and that "there is no flexibility" in these areas. The EU can be flexible on "small steps," such as human rights dialogue or cooperation on environmental and educational programs; it is currently in the Belorussians' court to show responsiveness in these areas.  
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